

Library Research in North Carolina

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Libraries can create an environment conducive to research in many ways. One example of long standing is the Library Research Forum sponsored annually for more than a decade by the Librarians' Association at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (LAUNC-CH). Specific responsibility for arranging the forum devolved, informally at first, then as a standing charge, upon LAUNC-CH's Professional Development Committee. This year Diane McKenzie (Health Sciences Library) is chair of the committee. She reconstructed for me the history of the Library Research Forum with information from the LAUNC-CH papers in the University Archives at UNC-CH.

LAUNC-CH held its first program on research in May 1979, when four campus librarians gave brief presentations on their research projects. The forum was presumably a success, for it was followed the next year by an expanded program. Not only were there reports on individual research, but also reports from the Library Research Advisory Council and from several task forces. Participants had only five minutes to cover their purpose, background, methodology, and results. Eventually, the forum settled upon a standard format and structure: ten- to fifteen-minute presentations on four to six research topics. Question-and-answer periods allow the audience to interact with the presenters.

In the twelve years that the Library Research Forum has been held, reports were given on research in nineteen broad areas. The two most frequently represented were cataloging and collection development. Topics were not limited to academic libraries, and they ranged from Chinese bookbinding, to sequential sampling of large populations, to discriminatory pricing of British journals by publishers. Since 1987, topics involving computerization in some form have predominated. "Research" is not rigidly defined, so topics have included informal in-house studies as well as works of scholarly rigor. Indeed, one of the purposes of LAUNC-CH is to explore different avenues to professional development. Often the talks are status reports on works in progress, but methodologies and techniques have also been discussed. More recently, however, the Professional Development Committee has recognized the need to emphasize formal research methods as a way of lending credence to results and conclusions.

Presenters were largely librarians at UNC-CH, with Luke Swindler (Social Science Bibliographer, Davis Library) holding the record for the most talks, followed closely by Pat Dominguez (Humanities Bibliographer, Davis Library) and Marcia Tuttle (Serials, Davis Library). Occasionally, a faculty member from the university's School of Information and Library Science has participated. In 1983, a librarian from North Carolina State



University (NCSU) co-presented a report.

This year's Library Research Forum was held in May 1990 and broke new ground by including librarians from NCSU not only on the program but also as guests. This change occurred in response to the results of an earlier survey showing that LAUNC-CH members strongly desired more involvement with other librarians in North Carolina. John Ulmschneider (Library Systems, NCSU Libraries) spoke on "Transmission of Digitized Images," focusing on a description of the technology used in the NCSU Libraries' applied research project with the National Agricultural Library (NAL). In particular, he addressed the differences between digitized imagery—a computer-based scanning technology that captures text and graphics for storage—and telefacsimile or full-text retrieval systems. As part of the National Agricultural Text Digitizing Project, NAL researchers will transmit to the NCSU Libraries digitized images of materials requested by NCSU users. Upon receipt, the file will be printed for the user or further transmitted directly to the end user for downloading and manipulation of the data, as desired.

Margaret Moore (Information Management Education Services, Health Sciences Library, UNC-CH) reported on "Evaluating End-User Training" through the Clinical Health Information Retrieval Project (CHIRP), jointly supported by the School of Medicine. CHIRP has made MEDLINE readily available to third-year medical students in an attempt to encourage their use of current biomedical research in clinical practice, as well as to assess techniques employed to train them in the use of MEDLINE. Survey responses collected from these students have raised additional questions, but there is overwhelming agreement that computerized searching should continue to be made available in the future. Expansion of the study in the future will help eventually to address the issue of the cost-effectiveness of instructional methods.

Eric E. Palo (Circulation Department, Davis Library) and Jerry D. Saye (School of Information and Library Science) gave a progress report on "Circulation and BIS Transaction Logs," a study to determine the relationship between online catalog searches and resulting circulation transactions. Palo described with understated humor some of the practical difficulties in transaction log analysis, particularly for truncated subject searches. While the authors may conclude that their specific methodology is not a fruitful one, Saye stressed

that the limitations may be attributable to the way that the Triangle Research Libraries Network's BIS online catalog handles searches. Questions to be pursued further include whether the research question could be answered using an online catalog with different programming, or whether an expert systems program could aid the investigation.

Eileen McGrath and Robert G. Anthony (both of the North Carolina Collection, UNC-CH) took us back to antebellum days with "Hayes and Hope: Two Early North Carolina Libraries." To add to the limited knowledge about early intellectual life in North Carolina, McGrath and Anthony are comparing the library collections of two families that produced men who played leading roles in the history of the state. McGrath has compiled a subject bibliography of the Hayes collection, which was left intact to the North Carolina Collection. Anthony, on the other hand, is in the process of recreating the Hope Library through careful analysis of primary source data such as handwritten court records from the time of the estate sale. A preliminary comparison shows that—probably reflecting the personalities of the men involved—the Hayes collection tends to have more literary works, while the Hope collection is stronger in politics, history, travel and biography. Titles duplicated in the two collections show that, as working libraries on large farms, the two collections held standard reference works on agriculture and animal husbandry, as well as basic texts on medicine. Other duplications reflect the political leanings of both men (e.g., *The Federalist Papers*).

The Research Forum at Chapel Hill is an annually anticipated event, usually drawing about forty library staff who respond to the lure of exposure to a variety of research projects using diverse research methodologies (not to mention the chance to socialize with colleagues and partake of the justly famous refreshments). Replication of the forum elsewhere is a relatively easy way to focus attention on library research. At UNC-CH, the costs are minimal (to cover food and supplies) and are covered by LAUNC-CH dues. Aside from the previously mentioned benefits, the research forum can be an opportunity for us to pause in our daily labors and see the world of librarianship from another person's organized perspective, and to regain or renew our sense of curiosity about our profession.